SECTION 3:
INVENTORY OF HISTORIC AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

3.0 INVENTORY OF HISTORIC AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

3.1 Historic Conditions

The following is a very abbreviated summary of the tranformations to the Sand Point peninsula landscape, from pre-Euro-American settlement to the present day.

Approximately 700 aboriginal Native Americans were reported living on the shores of Lake Washington and its environs during the mid-nineteenth century (Buerge, 1984). Seven winter villages were located around the lakeshore, usually at the mouth of a salmon stream or along the portage route from the lake to Puget Sound. A group situated near Union Bay used Green Lake and the salmon resources of Ravenna Creek; another one located at Wolf Bay used the small prairie near the current Windermere community and the resources of Mud Lake at what is now Sand Point Magnuson Park (Buerge 1984). A third group lived at the mouth of Thornton Creek at Matthews Beach, just north of Sand Point (Waterman 1922). Use of Lake Washington by Native Americans apparently continued until 1916 when the Lake Washington Ship Canal was built and the water level in the lake was lowered by nine feet, thus affecting fisheries resources which were a key element for Native American use.

Settlement of the Puget Sound area by Euro-Americans commenced in the 1800's. The following is a brief time-line of Euro-American documented use in the vicinity of Sand Point Magnuson Park.

1860's	Euro-Americans begin settling the Puget Sound and Lake Washington areas under the Homestead Act.
1870's	Morgan J. Carkeek acquired property along Pontiac Bay (NW corner of present day SPMP).
1885	Seattle Lake Shore & Eastern Railroad was extended to Pontiac Bay 1885 Sand Point area first surveyed by John R. Neal.
1900	Washington Shipyards moved to Houghton, WA; brickyard developed at Pontiac Bay area.
1916	Water level of Lake Washington lowered 9 feet with the construction of the Ship Canal and Chittenden Locks, significantly reducing the size of Mud Lake and Pontiac Bay.
1918	Carkeek property deeded to the city for a park (NW corner of present day SPMP).
1919	King County acquired 416 acres to establish Naval Station Seattle (Carkeek property included in 1929, Carkeek Park moved to NW Seattle).
1925	Navy formally accepted the property.
1920-30's	Sand Point landscape was leveled; Mud Lake and Pontiac Bay were filled to accommodate runways and buildings. An additional 37-acre plot was acquired for necessary improvements and construction.
1935-45	Most of the buildings constructed on Naval Station Seattle.

1976-78	Warren G. Magnuson Park was created and developed after the City received approximately 195 acres from the decommissioned portion of Naval Seattle. Swimming beach, boat launching, and sports fields areas were built after most of old runway pavements were demolished.
1993	Sand Point Magnuson Plan to expand park adopted by the Seattle City Council.
1996	Management of remainder of former Navy facility transferred to the City of Seattle.
1999	Magnuson Park Concept Plan adopted by City Council Resolution (30063).

3.2 Current Conditions Studies

Over the years several studies have been conducted within the Park to identify existing habitats, bird and mammal use, and vegetation conditions. The following is a brief summary of the applicable studies; copies of these studies can be obtained from Sand Point Magnuson Park staff at their offices.

3.2.1 Magnuson Park Habitats Project Survey of Existing Conditions (Audubon. January 31, 1997.)

This project, conducted by Seattle Audubon Society, consisted of a four-month survey of existing conditions at Magnuson Park, including bird counts, a study of wildlife habitat, a survey of native and invasive plants, and an examination of the history, present, and future of the park. The project also included a series of interpretive walks and the installation of interpretive signage at the park. A total of 125 species of birds were observed at the park, including permanent residents, spring and summer breeders, wintering birds, migrants, and accidentals. Forty-seven species of birds have been observed in the shoreline areas, 26 species in the forested areas, 25 species in meadow habitats, 32 species in scrub/shrub habitats, and 13 species in managed and disturbed areas. The most frequent mammals present at the park were domestic and feral cats and dogs, mice, rabbits, rats, voles, possums, and raccoons, and possibly beaver and coyote.

Field observations led to the definition of five categories of habitats in Magnuson Park that were illustrated on a map: meadow/wet meadow; shoreline; forest; scrub/shrub habitat; and managed and disturbed areas. Invasive non-native weeds have been introduced to the area through human activities, and are spreading rapidly into native plant communities.

3.2.2 Magnuson Park Wildlife Habitat Study (Adolfson Associates, Inc. November 1998.)

This study was also funded by the Seattle Audubon Society. Field observations of habitat types and vertebrate wildlife use at Magnuson Park were conducted in April, May, June, and September 1998. Six primary habitat types, including forest, scrub/shrub, meadow, shallow near-shore, maintained lawn and developed areas were

identified. In addition, 16 seasonal wetlands and drainage features were identified during reconnaissance-level investigation, including palustrine forested, scrub/shrub, and emergent habitat types. These observations did not include any formal wetland delineation, and did not constitute identification of regulated or jurisdictional wetlands. The report notes that several of these wetlands are connected via culverts that act as drainage features, and that at least one wetland has a seasonally ponded area that provides habitat for Pacific chorus frogs.

3.2.3 Seattle Urban Nature Project Map, September 2000

The Seattle Urban Nature mapping project conducted a field inventory of the resource lands present in Magnuson Park from fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2000. Their map presents a graphical representation of the habitats of Magnuson Park. The four major habitats include forest, open canopy, wetlands, and developed landscape, all presented with various subcategories. Identification of wetlands did not include any official delineation, and did not constitute identification of regulated or jurisdictional wetlands. Their field work and map also identified the areas within the Park where invasive non-natives formed a significant component of the vegetative cover. Their map indicates percent cover of invasive species including Himalayan blackberry, holly, English ivy, reed canary grass, and Scot's broom.

3.2.4 Magnuson Park: Existing Conditions (2001)

Field assessment of existing conditions was conducted in the summer of 2001 for this study and other related activities at the Park. That field assessment identified 10 different vegetation community types within the vegetated portions of Sand Point Magnuson Park. All of the habitats and vegetation communities within the Park have been altered historically: most of the quite significantly. The majority of the 'natural' landscapes within the Park are the result of 20+ years of recovery and establishment since the air station uses have stopped. Extensive concrete and pavement runways were removed in the 1970's and in most instances, no attempt to restore or regenerate native plant communities was made.

The result is that the majority of the Park is vegetated by a daunting mix of native and non-native herbs/grasses, shrubs, and trees. Some species, once purposefully planted, now are considered as noxious invasives (Lombardy poplars). Other species were not installed, but have thrived in the severely altered and depleted soils present on the site (Himalayan blackberry and Scot's broom). Even some invasive non-natives, such as blackberry, are cherished by some community members as a source of family activity in late summer berry-picking season. Some non-natives, such as the Lombardy poplars throughout the center of the Park and the non-native weeping willows along the shoreline, present large canopy masses that impact views from within and outside the Park.

Habitat values within the Park are variable. There is great benefit in having such expansive open vegetated open space near the lake margins. However, the lack of native species, the lack of structural elements in the forests, and the paucity of

vegetation community types in the Park severely limits the benefits of the existing habitats for a wide array of potential wildlife species.

There are wetlands within the natural areas of the Park: expanses of wet meadows characterized by native and non-native grasses and rushes. Multiple small seasonal marshes are present, where surface water collects and stays in pools of 4"-18" in depth, long enough to provide some habitat for amphibians and native freshwater snails. Stands of black cottonwood have established around the margins of these small impoundments, causing them to shift from emergent marsh communities to shrub and tree dominated wetlands. Upland grassland meadows are still present, although non-native hawthorn and Himalayan blackberry pose a risk. Most shrub thickets are dominated by non-native blackberry and hawthorn: both of which provide food source and cover for birds and small mammals.

Promontory Point provides the most intact upland forest complex on the site, though smaller stands of upland black cottonwoods and madrone sapling stands also exist. Small blocks of remnant upland forest also flank 65th Avenue NE toward the west end of the Park; the southerly of these blocks contains substantial intact canopy and understory, the northerly, fewer residual natives due to invasion by exotic species. All the vegetation community types are discussed more fully in each specific area of a Management Area, in Section 5 of this report, as well as in appendices.

3.2.5 Sand Point Existing Conditions (2001)

Existing vegetation in the developed landscape areas of the former Naval Station Sand Point was documented in two ways, to assess condition of both its canopy and understory components. An understory characterization was completed by walkthrough mapping in late summer, 2001, noting type and general condition of vegetation. See Appendix for summary of baseline findings. In addition to vestige historic shrub plantings, newly-planted beds were examined, and areas of turf, "meadow", and invasives or neglect identified. The developed landscape's understory spans a very wide range of composition and care, although mowed lawn, minimally-maintained, clearly dominates.

To document the canopy element, a comprehensive tree inventory was completed during the first half of 2001. Trees were mapped and individual characteristics noted, including: species, number & diameter of trunks, height, spread, crown type, canopy vigor, health, defects (dead/broken limbs, lean, trunk wound, decay, structural problems), evidence of past management (topping, cabling, pruning), and presence of potential targets should a tree fail.

Complete data sets were generated for the Historic District Zone and Sand Point East Housing Zone, plus some additional partial areas. Summary and analysis of inventory findings are included in Appendix C, in addition to tree locator maps. Full GIS-integrated tree maps and inventory database will be provided both electronically and as hard copy to SPM Park staff, for their ongoing use and reference.

The tree inventory revealed information key to vegetation management planning for Sand Point. A high proportion of trees within the Historic District is identified in the HPRP Plan as "Historic Landscape Features to be Preserved and Maintained." Of these, the majority have been topped, and almost all have potential targets due to the open, pedestrian-accessible understory and proximity to both buildings and roads. Significant numbers of trees are members of species known to have serious inherent problems, including proven invasiveness, susceptibility to insects or disease, and proclivity for structural failure at maturity.

In addition, many trees originally were planted very close to buildings or to one another (notably along Sand Point Way), resulting in both canopy and rootzone cramping and potential for long-term instability. Given the presence of both resident and workforce populations, hazard trees assume added significance, beyond that already associated with a public-use, open park setting. Developing an abatement strategy must therefore be given highest vegetation management priority. All told, a great many problems plague this large, historically-valuable tree population, most of which cannot prudently be ignored.

Just as recreation of habitat will require enormous, sustained investment in other parts of the Park, so also will care and restoration of vegetation in the developed Sand Point landscape. In the former setting, disturbance and neglect are primary culprits, in the latter, errors in past tree selection, placement and maintenance – as well as neglect in understory areas. Vegetation management and site redevelopment thus will need to proceed hand-in-hand, in coordinated fashion.

3.3 Public Comment on Vegetation Management Plan

The City of Seattle DPR staff conducted four public meetings in the summer and fall of 2001 for the proposed Vegetation Management Plan. Information materials were mailed to households in the surrounding neighborhood and northeast Seattle. In addition e-mail notices were sent to citywide and regional environmental organizations. Comments from the public were taken at each meeting. Written comments (letters and emails) were also invited from individuals, active citizens groups, and other organizations. In Appendix A of this report is a summary of the range of comments received during those meetings. Presented below is an abbreviated summary of the main topic areas and perspectives covered by the public comments:

Views

- Restore views of the beach and lake from private property outside of the Park.
- Maintain expansive views inside the park and across the lake to Mt. Rainier.
- Block views of structures outside the park from areas inside of the Park.
- Don't manage the vegetation within the Park to maintain or restore views from private property to the lake.

Habitat
- Maintain diverse habitat types within the Park.
- Restore habitat types inside the Park.
- Restore fish habitat along the shoreline of Lake Washington.
- Link habitats within the Park to one another and to the Lake.
- Plant native trees and shrubs to create native habitats.
- Don't plant any trees that will grow more than 20 feet tall.

Invasive Plants
- Remove and control aggressive invasive shrubs, trees and herbs.
- Maintain some blackberries for family picking activity.

Historic Area
- Restore and maintain the historic area vegetation per the previously adopted Plans.
- Remove the tall deodora cedars.
- Keep and replace the deodora cedars.
- Restore the gardens, period plantings, azaleas and rhododendrons.
- Maintain the historic view corridors as identified in the Historic Plans.

Recreation
- Provide for continued passive recreation such as walking, biking, swimming.
- Manage Kite Hill to provide for continued use for recreational kite flying

Art
- Maintain the grass area within the Fin Art zone in a manner that benefits the art installation and viewer access.
- Maintain the grass and adjacent native shrub plantings near and in the Fin Art area to restore/create habitat.

Comments on all issues covered a broad range of perspectives, usually including voices from opposite ends of all spectrums on each issue. The most contentious issue was that of the conflict between managing the vegetation within Sand Point Magnuson Park for views from private property located outside of the Park and managing Park vegetation to restore and maintain native habitats within open spaces of the Park. This is not a conflict with a simple resolution: off-site views based on visual access to the beach of Lake Washington within Sand Point Magnuson Park cannot be restored and maintained while restoring native vegetation communities to zones within the main body of the Park and/or pockets along the shoreline.

Restoring views to the conditions of the mid 1970's (the time of Naval Air Station transfer of the lands to City responsibility) would entail removal of many native black cottonwood trees that have reached heights of 40-50+ feet in the 25 years since the landing strip tarmac was removed. Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation's 2001 Tree Policy states that trees on public land will not be removed or topped to provide views from private property. The summary of key vegetation-related relevant goals and

policies from applicable adopted City-wide and Sand Point Magnuson specific Plans (see Section 2 of this Plan) directs DPR towards restoring native habitats, managing trees for health and control of hazards, improving canopy coverage by native trees, managing for environmental health and stewardship, and preserving the historic character of specific zones within Sand Point Magnuson Park. This Vegetation Management Plan attempts to follow the directions established by previously adopted City Plans, Policies, and the legal agreements the City entered into, that relate to vegetation issues embedded at Sand Point Magnuson Park.

Comments from the four public meetings, the Board of Park Commissioners Public Hearing, as well as additional written comments received are incorporated into the final VMP where possible.